

Scarlet Runner

Vitagraph Company

From the Popular Novel of the same name
by C. N. and A. M. Williamson

Stars of This Episode

MR. EARLE WILLIAMS as CHRISTOPHER RACE
MISS BILLIE BILLINGS as MISS CONSTANCE WARREN

Next Week Another Story and New Picture

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Chapter VII—The Red-Whiskered Man.

"What a queer place for a rich man's relatives to live!" thought Christopher, looking up in a puzzled way at the tall, dilapidated house in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, in front of which stood a small, dark, old-fashioned carriage.

Christopher, who by special arrangement and extra payment had brought the motor across from England on the night boat to the Hook of Holland, had spun along good clinker roads, bowing his car and his one passenger into Amsterdam in time for a late breakfast. That meal he had taken at a hotel, while his employer (unknown to him a few days before) had driven off in a cab to the house of a relative, who was expected to join the party for a week's run through Holland. Instructions were that, after breakfast and a couple of hours' rest, Christopher was to call at a certain address.

Here he was, then, in front of the house, an ancient, secretive-looking building that looked forward as if it were to tumble into ruin might come at any moment; and a vague suspicion of mystery in his errand suddenly stole into Christopher's mind.

The young man with the features, bearing and manner of an Englishman, the accent of Oxford, and the name of a Dutchman, Van Cortlandt—had seemed frankness itself. He had insisted (as he was a stranger to Christopher) that the car was to be taken out of England upon paying fifty pounds in advance. He had been an agreeable companion during the run, showing himself a cosmopolitan in knowledge of the world's literature and of drama. Christopher was inclined to like and admire his passenger, and fancied that the Dutch cousin to be visited in Amsterdam would turn out a merchant prince. Yet this was the cousin's house; the hour appointed had passed, and young Mr. Cortlandt seemed in no hurry to appear with his relative.

It was a house, Christopher told himself, where things might happen; and wasn't it, now he came to think of it, a little odd that Van Cortlandt had asked him to wait without sending in word or announcing his presence in any way?

When he had sat in front of the house for a quarter of an hour, Christopher stopped the motor, and it was after he had done this that the door opened and a girl came out. She wore a blue tissue veil draped over her hat, and the long ends fluttered gracefully behind her in the slight breeze. She was dressed in a neat, inconspicuous tailor suit of dark gray, and carried in her hand a roll of music in a leather case. Perhaps it was vanity on Christopher's part, but he fancied that the large eyes glimmering alluringly through the veils roved upon Scarlet Runner with interest and even curiosity. He watched the girl as she walked to the corner, and at the end of the street saw her hail a cab. Immediately afterwards a man who had been staring aimlessly at the bottles in a cheap hairdresser's shop on the other side of the way became abruptly aware that he had been waiting time. He hurried off in the direction the girl had taken, and also found a cab, so promptly as to suggest the idea that it had been waiting his orders.

"Doesn't look like the driver of fellow who could afford to drive off," Christopher said to himself, faintly interested, and so forgetting his own affairs for the instant that it was a surprise suddenly to see Mr. Ean van Cortlandt standing in the street.

How he had got there Christopher was not sure, but one thing was certain; he had not come out of the building in front of which Scarlet Runner had been waiting for nearly half an hour. The man was a vague suspicion in the mind of Scarlet Runner's owner that his employer had run down the steps of a house two doors farther on, but his thoughts had been occupied with the house, and he could not have sworn to this had it been to save his own life or Van Cortlandt's.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said the other. "It's unavoidable. He paused for a moment, evidently having something more he wanted to say and not knowing how best to say it.

"And I'm sorry, too," Mr. van Cortlandt went on, "that all this has changed. My cousin, who was to have gone with me on this motor trip, can't—family affliction, something quite sudden; and that being the case, I feel it would be best, as well as gloomy, to make the tour without him. However, you shan't suffer in any way by the change. Mr. Race, for matters between us shall stand exactly as if I'd been using your car for the next week, as arranged. And I've made up my mind to turn round and go back to England today, after all."

Christopher was surprised, but he showed no astonishment. He merely remarked, civilly, that they pleased him in Mr. van Cortlandt's family and disappointment for Mr. van Cortlandt himself.

Nothing could have been pleasanter or more friendly than the conversation of the two young men in discussing the situation; nevertheless, Christopher had a strong, if inexplicable, conviction that, in some way and for some reason, this was an important matter, and that the trip he was to make was of the utmost importance. He had been told that the man who had been taken to the Amsterdam relatives of Mr. van Cortlandt, and that Mr. van Cortlandt had never really intended to take the trip, Christopher had ventured to think rather scanty provision for a week's tour. But Van Cortlandt had a different idea. He suggested, that as Race had arranged for the disposal of the engine, he had better be the one to ask for it; otherwise, and made no new suggestions, but mounted to the seat beside Christopher, which Jacobs had last occupied, giving at the same time a glance at his servants which sent them to a distance.

Race did not begin his story at the beginning, but very near the end, shuffling over what had happened until he reached the episode at the inn. When Maritz heard that Van Cortlandt and Miss Warren had been seized by men in the dress of policemen, his dark face suddenly paled.

"But my nephew told you to drive on, to come here?" he demanded tersely.

"Yes, and I came as fast as I could, after sending back three genuine policemen to the rescue."

"Then where is that which my nephew trusted you to bring to me?" "He trusted me with nothing—except the car," said Christopher, looking at Miss Warren, who had been seized by men in the dress of policemen, his dark face suddenly paled.

wise there might be a misunderstanding. Also he was to order something to eat and drink on the journey. Christopher agreed, wondering, half humorously, half anxiously, if the plot consisted in making off with Scarlet Runner during his absence.

During one of the moments when Christopher's passenger diverted from his best-laid possession, Mr. van Cortlandt left his seat and began examining the car with frank interest. His back was turned to the door of the hotel, and Christopher stood by, but when the owner of the car came hurriedly out, accompanied by a porter with the suit case and a waiter with a neat parcel, the passenger was peering into the petrol tank. "You're sure there isn't a queer smell?" he inquired. "I thought as we came there was bad carburetion, or something."

Christopher, quick in defense of his starting, denied this bad carburetion, and explained to the amateur that, even if it had existed, the petrol in the tank could have nothing to do with it.

They had an uneventful drive to the Hook. Christopher, who intended as a matter of course to guard the car on board the boat, expected that his passenger would take a cabin and rest during the passage, which promised to be disagreeable owing to the steamy, unseasonable heat of the weather. But Van Cortlandt would not hear of leaving his chauffeur to get through the night alone. That would not be "sporting," said he, and the two spent the seven hours of the voyage together, never for a second out of sight of Scarlet Runner.

It was the gray, misty dawn of a mid-August day when the boat slowed into harbor. The passengers looked shadowy and anxious as ghosts who had just been ferried across the Styx. Christopher and his companion had not seen any of their fellow-passengers during the night, as they had boarded earlier than the others, on account of the car. As they were somewhat out of the way of the passing crowd, and could not leave the ship until every one else had gone, they would in all probability have got off as they had got on, without meeting a soul, had not a young woman, with a modest air of wishing to escape observation, flitted out of the way of the passengers pressing up from the cabins.

She wore a neat, dark gray tailor suit; her hat was draped with a blue tissue veil which fell over and covered her face; and she carried in her hand a leather-cased roll of music.

"By Jove!" muttered Van Cortlandt under his breath; and instantly it was clear to Christopher that he was not alone in recognizing the pretty, girlish figure.

Race kept silence; but the other started forward, and without joining the girl, approached near enough to call her in a low voice without being heard by any of the more distant passengers. Watching intently, Christopher saw her start, peer anxiously through the blue cloud of her veil (which she did not lift, and then flit quickly up to Van Cortlandt. Evidently it was a great surprise for her to see him as it was for him to find her on board. But they talked together in whispers, speaking with intense earnestness, the girl's back turned to the other passengers.

Among these, however, was an elderly, spectacled man, with old-fashioned side-whiskers, turning gray from age, and with a shaggy brow and a link hair matched in color the girl's. He looked at her with a keen interest, and as if he had seen her before.

It was at this moment that Christopher became aware of the man's existence. He saw him glance at Van Cortlandt and turn away with some slight suggestion of haste; but evidently Van Cortlandt recognized him in another acquaintance. The face of his employer was turned from Christopher, but the quick start forward he made told his own tale.

The other man hesitated as if unwilling to answer, and Van Cortlandt spoke again sharply. "Surely you know me? Surely you know who I am?"

"I suppose so," the stranger admitted at last.

"Then in Heaven's name, tell me—in the name of all the demons—why you, too, are on board this boat, when you ought—"

But Race caught no more. The sandy-whiskered man moved closer to Van Cortlandt, and the two fell into a conversation to which the girl listened without joining in.

By this time the boat was moored and the people beginning to go off. Presently no one was left save Scarlet Runner's owner, her late passenger, and that passenger's two new-found acquaintances. As the last group crowded the gangway Van Cortlandt came to Race, leaving the girl and the elderly man standing together.

"I suppose you won't mind carrying three of us instead of one?" he said. "A young lady I know has unexpectedly turned up, and a man with whom I had no idea they were on board with us until I saw them this morning. In fact, it's only by a series of accidents that they are not somewhere else. But being here, and both bound for London, if you don't object, I would like to take them on the car. They have nothing with them except hand luggage."

Christopher answered that Scarlet Runner would not feel the difference between two passengers and four; and as soon as the car was on dry land and ready to start the newly arranged party boarded her. Formerly Van Cortlandt had sat beside the driver, and such luggage as the two young men carried was in the tonneau. But now the old man was placed in front with Christopher and Van Cortlandt, and the girl's companion in the tonneau, the big kit-bag and suitcase being put on the roof.

Neither of the new occupants of the car was properly prepared for motor-land. As for the girl, her hat was low and broad, and before starting she took off her veil and made a scarf of it, which she tied over her head and under her chin. Thus Christopher's wish was gratified, and he saw that she was very pretty, even prettier than he had dared to picture her, after that tantalizing glimpse of big, dark, eyes.

She was distinctly of the gypsy type, with a dusky color coming and going under the brown of her peach-smooth cheeks. Deep dimples sprang into life as she laughed; her great black eyes were exceedingly brilliant and full of expression, while every little gesture had an individual grace and eloquence which spoke of a singularly vivid personality. There was no doubt that she was a lady; and the first words that Christopher heard her speak told him that she was an American.

In spite of the tiresome journey and the heat of the day, the girl was life, and was childishly delighted with the prospect of several hours' spin in a fine automobile. Possibly, too, Van Cortlandt's presence had something to do with her pleasure. In any case it was plain that she was an object of deep interest to the young man, who could scarcely take his eyes from her face.

The man on the front seat was apparently far from being as well satisfied with his situation as the others. He pulled his hat as far down as possible to keep the dust out of his eyes, turned up the collar of his overcoat, then nervously unbuttoned the great

cause of a person who apparently chased her in a cab from the first, and who climbed into her railway carriage at the last minute, she jumped out after the train began to move, risking trouble with Dutch officials, to say nothing of broken bones. She is a brave girl. But I knew that before hand." And Ean van Cortlandt gave Miss Warren a look which, if he had wished to hide his feelings for her, would have been, to say the least, imprudent.

"I was quite sure I had nothing to do with it," Jacobs insisted, anxious to exonerate himself. "Of course, the man may have been only an ordinary pickpocket. But do I look like a man whose pocket would be worth picking? This is to watch I carry about with me." And, somewhat ostentatiously, he pulled out a plain old gun-metal watch.

Christopher heard this talk with interest, and confessed to himself that, though it wasn't "his affair," he would like to know the nature of the message to which the man beside him had so cautiously referred.

Before them now rose the spires and the clustered roofs of a village, and as they entered it Jacobs, who had been silent after putting away his watch, turned again to speak to Van Cortlandt.

"It would be a great favor," he said, "if you would be willing to make a short stop here, sir, only long enough for me to send a telegram. I don't

know if your uncle mentioned to you that my wife is ill and worrying about this trip of mine?"

Van Cortlandt consented to the slight delay, and Christopher stopped the car in front of the village post-office. Jacobs scrambled lightly down, like a younger man than he appeared to be; and Christopher happened to notice that his hands looked strong and muscular. As he hurried into the postoffice Van Cortlandt strolled after him, buying a few stamps and standing near enough to take a glance at the address on the telegram. This was not because he distrusted Jacobs, but because he had much at stake in this venture, and could not afford to take chances. The cipher message was unobscure, but the name of Jacobs stood plainly at the top, and Van Cortlandt was satisfied, as he had expected to be.

At last they were off again, but they had not gone far when Jacobs cried out that his handkerchief had just blown away. It was one he valued; his wife had embroidered his initials on it. Really, he thought he saw it caught in a bush a little way behind. By Van Cortlandt's consent, Christopher reversed the car and went back for half a mile; but the handkerchief was not found, though Jacobs got out and thoroughly ransacked a group of bushes to look for it, being gone some time. Returning, he rejoined the road ahead of Scarlet Runner, which stood throbbing impatient to be off; and Christopher thought, as he advanced towards the car, shaking his head and bemoaning his loss, that he scattered something by the way. Starting off again, with the nervous old man hardly settled in his place, there came a sharp explosion, and Scarlet Runner had burst a tire.

The sudden sound gave Jacobs a shock, which caused him to grip the seat nervously and cry out. He had never been in a motor before, he exclaimed, and thought that some one must have shot at the car.

Some curious conjectures passed through the mind of Race as he gripped his work of repairing, with his three passengers sitting, or walking up and down, by the roadside. What he thought he kept to himself, as it would have been the height of imprudence to accuse, on the suspicion, the trusted employee of his own employer. Nevertheless, when the tire was changed and Scarlet Runner had burst a tire, he threw an occasional glance through the whistled face under the shadow of the dusty hat-brim.

The day grew more and more sultry, and the air was so heavy that even in driving there was no freshness. The thick dust also was very disagreeable, especially for the two new members of the party, who were unprepared for motoring; and Christopher was not surprised when, after about two-thirds of the run to London, Jacobs complained of headache and vertigo.

He was, he supposed, in an apologetic mood, his inexperience in motoring, as well as having been somewhat upset at sea, which caused him to suffer now; but Christopher suggested that it was far more likely to be the weight of his big overcoat, and advised him to take it off.

There were no pockets on the outside of the coat, which would be several of the kind of hidden ones that Jacobs seemed so certain that the contents of such pockets must be safe, when he had taken off the overcoat he not only sat upon, but leaned both

shoulders against it, as it draped the back of the seat.

Still, he felt no better, and on coming in sight of an old-fashioned roadside inn not far outside the dark fringe of London suburbs, he begged that the car might pause at the door long enough for him to get a glass of brandy.

"Haven't you better wait a bit till we get farther on?" asked Van Cortlandt, not unemphatically. "The stuff's sure to be bad here."

"Oh, sir, if you knew how faint and queer I feel—" faltered Jacobs; and Christopher hastily slowed down in front of the inn, where a small, uncovered automobile was already standing, covered with fresh dust.

The whiskered face was gray with dust, therefore it was impossible to see the natural state of the sufferer's complexion; but he sat with eyes half closed and head bowed forward, as if on the verge of unconsciousness, and Van Cortlandt jumped quickly out to order the brandy. Miss Warren sprang down from the car also, coming round to the front for an anxious look at the sick man's face, and to ask if she could do anything. She had her leather-cased music roll in her hand, and Christopher saw the dulled eyes of Jacobs glance at it, from under drooping lids.

Then, just as Van Cortlandt would have entered the inn, out burst the waiter, who had been waiting for a moment. "We arrest you all on a warrant, charged with theft," called

the man, and he and the lady with him

are the victims of a plot, and have just been arrested by three thieves disguised as policemen. They appealed to the landlord and several other men, but the power of the law is so much respected that naturally the pretended policemen were believed against them. I was sent off to Mr. Maritz, whom I want to see as quickly as I can, and if you and your comrades can get to the scene before the thieves have hustled their victims away—"

The inspector waited to near no more. All his professional pride was on fire. "Go on, Mr. Race," he broke in. "I'll overlook your furious driving this time. And have no fear for your friends. It's a strange story you tell, but I know you, and I believe it. We've got bicycles, and as the house is only a mile away, well, there before you can say 'Jack Robinson'."

"Take care you don't go beyond the legal limit," laughed Christopher excitedly, and sped off at a speed to risk being "held up" by another police officer.

"First time in my life I was glad to get caught in one of those," he said to himself, "and I'd be willing to bet it will be the last."

At least it was the last for that day; for he was not again stopped on his way into town, though he had been he must have confessed that he deserved it. Never had he driven so fast through traffic, except on the day when he followed the automobile with the Nuremberg waltz; and at the last moment, as he drove through bronze gates into the millionaire's famous courtyard, he just escaped being crashed into by a passing motor omnibus.

Never had Christopher been inside these magnificent gates before, but so often had he seen the courtyard peeped in at through papers, when the house was new and the wonder of London, that marble walls and pillars, Venetian windows and great bronze statues, appeared familiar to him.

The gates had been opened, perhaps, for electric broughams which stood before the door to pass out, and the servants in livery glared daggers at the reckless chauffeur who dashed in, risking a collision. But Christopher stopped Scarlet Runner at a safe distance, and called out that he wished to see Mr. Maritz on urgent business.

At the sound of that name a gentleman looked from the window of the brougham, and his face had been made familiar by the same methods which immortalized his mansion.

"I come from Mr. Van Cortlandt," added Christopher, this time addressing himself directly to the millionaire. He expected to see a look of enlightenment dawn on the clever, somewhat hard, features. But, to his surprise, for an instant Peter Maritz appeared puzzled.

"Mr. Van Cortlandt?" he repeated, questioning. Then, with a slight exclamation and a change of expression, he opened the door of the brougham before his alert servants had time to touch it.

"You have a message for me from Mr. Van Cortlandt?" he asked.

"Not exactly a message," answered Christopher. "But I have news of importance."

"Come indoors with me and tell it, then," said Peter Maritz, who had the manners of a gentleman as well as the wealth of a millionaire.

Christopher looked doubtful. "I'm not sure about leaving the car," he replied in a lower voice. "I may be carrying something of—er—considerable value."

Maritz asked no further questions, and made no new suggestions, but mounted to the seat beside Christopher, which Jacobs had last occupied, giving at the same time a glance at his servants which sent them to a distance.

Race did not begin his story at the beginning, but very near the end, shuffling over what had happened until he reached the episode at the inn. When Maritz heard that Van Cortlandt and Miss Warren had been seized by men in the dress of policemen, his dark face suddenly paled.

"But my nephew told you to drive on, to come here?" he demanded tersely.

"Yes, and I came as fast as I could, after sending back three genuine policemen to the rescue."

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As the last word formed itself in his mind it was as though it had been a magic summons to call up other men in blue coats; for before Scarlet Runner had got her speed again three uniformed figures leaped from behind a clump of trees to line up across the road.

Christopher's first thought was to blame himself for slowing down to glance behind; and to atone by making a dash, scattering the men, who might be conspirators in the sum plot. But, even at a distance, his clear-sighted eyes recognized a face he had seen before. One of these policemen was a well known "motor trapper," with whom Christopher had come into friendly contact more than once. Whatever the men at the inn a mile back might be, these were genuine servants of the law; and a brilliant idea danced into Christopher's mind. With the view of making it useful, he slowed down instantly.

"You've done the measured distance at a speed of fifty and a half miles an hour," said the inspector of police, whom Christopher remembered, his stop-watch in his hand. "Where's your license?"

"Here it is, and here's my card," answered Race. "Don't you know me, inspector—in spite of the dust? And don't you know Scarlet Runner?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Race. I recognize you now," said the policeman. "I'm sorry to say, however, as you were going at such a speed—"

"First offense, isn't it?" laughed Christopher. "And when you've heard a word or two, I think even you will be justified in exceeding the legal limit. Summon me if you think right; but go back now to the next public house and rescue my passengers, one of whom is, I believe, a nephew of the millionaire, Peter Maritz. He and the lady with him

are the victims of a plot, and have just been arrested by three thieves disguised as policemen. They appealed to the landlord and several other men, but the power of the law is so much respected that naturally the pretended policemen were believed against them. I was sent off to Mr. Maritz, whom I want to see as quickly as I can, and if you and your comrades can get to the scene before the thieves have hustled their victims away—"

The inspector waited to near no more. All his professional pride was on fire. "Go on, Mr. Race," he broke in. "I'll overlook your furious driving this time. And have no fear for your friends. It's a strange story you tell, but I know you, and I believe it. We've got bicycles, and as the house is only a mile away, well, there before you can say 'Jack Robinson'."

"Take care you don't go beyond the legal limit," laughed Christopher excitedly, and sped off at a speed to risk being "held up" by another police officer.

"First time in my life I was glad to get caught in one of those," he said to himself, "and I'd be willing to bet it will be the last."

At least it was the last for that day; for he was not again stopped on his way into town, though he had been he must have confessed that he deserved it. Never had he driven so fast through traffic, except on the day when he followed the automobile with the Nuremberg waltz; and at the last moment, as he drove through bronze gates into the millionaire's famous courtyard, he just escaped being crashed into by a passing motor omnibus.

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